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Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

I am a clinical psychologist and have been working in this field for over 30 years. The Better Access Initiative has been the most effective and ground breaking mental health service this country has ever seen. As a result I have involved in treating children, adolescents, adults and families who, previously would have slipped through the system. Previously this clientele would have later likely been a much greater burden to the government due to alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, child protection issues and more serious mental illness in adulthood. Although not all situations require 12 to 18 sessions, the more serious mental health issues do require at least that number of treatment sessions. A ceiling of 10 sessions will only cover mild psychological conditions or adjustment disorders that are not the precursors to serious mental illness and/or behavioural disorders. In my practise, at present, I am treating an 18 year old schizophrenic, several clients with borderline personality disorder, several clients with chronic pain and depression, several who have been victims of sexual abuse and rape and multiple children with complex, combined diagnoses including autism, anxiety, learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder. Cases of this complexity require, not only the option of 12 to 18 sessions, but also the skills and training of a Clinical Psychologist. Most of these clients also could not afford treatment if reimbursement was reduced to the lower tier provided for focussed psychological strategies.

The two tiered Medicare rebate has permitted lower socio-economic groups to access a rebate that has made psychological services affordable, as well as remunerating clinical psychologists for the expertise in their field. Clinical psychologists are trained to treat complex mental disorders which require specialist psychological intervention, in circumstances where there are deep-rooted underlying influences, or which call for the discretionary capacity to draw on a multiple theoretical base, to devise an individually tailored strategy for a complex presenting problem. Flexibility to adapt and combine approaches is the key to competence at this level which comes from a broad, thorough and sophisticated understanding of the various psychological theories. This level of training has not been completed by non-clinical psychologists. It is the same as the difference between a General Practitioner and a Medical Specialist. The latter requires longer and more intense training in a certain field. Both provide an important service to the public but specialists would not embark on protracted study if they thought they would not be compensated for the time and cost of their training.

Clinical Psychologist